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Standardized Testing: Haven't We Had Enough?

Today, standardized testing seems like a weekend with the in-laws; inescapable and inevitable. That's what most, if not all, of today's curriculum is based around, and it's become unavoidable. As someone who's endured *seven* different standardized tests and has suffered through what my high school teachers called "test-taker burnout," I can definitely say that this *needs* to end. Standardized testing has become quite a controversial topic, especially among teachers. Lately, there are many issues surrounding standardized testing, such as testing fraud scandals, poor curriculum balance, and the realization that data shows they don't reflect students' true potential. This system fails many students in K-12 and college, and the only thing that's seemed to change is that there's *more*. Why is it that these tests are pushed on kids as young as *five*? Why doesn't that seem like a reason to put in a better system? This pushes incredibly young children through something unnecessary. Not only that, but it gives a lot of these young students the mentality of, "If I don't pass, I'll be held back," and that is incredibly *unfair*. Standardized testing needs to be eliminated because it is a harmful tool that can ultimately define a student's learning path and hurt their potential.

To be able to understand how the issue of standardized testing should be covered, we have to examine why it's such a big deal in American education. First off, the standards for these tests are what most curriculums are based around, and some students have a difficult time retaining that knowledge, which puts them at a massive disadvantage. In the article,

"Standardized Testing Is Overrated. Here's How I'm Working to Change It in My State," the author Mark Johnson states, "Yet the education system relies on standardized tests that are designed based on what the "average" student should know," (Johnson, 2021). Johnson makes a strong point here that these tests are based on something that isn't real; no student is considered "average" by any means. If students *were* "average," that would give schools reason to give these tests, to set them apart from everyone around them. The curriculum is what these tests are based around, which in a way, makes these students come off as average. What school administrators don't see in those class observations is which students are excelling and which students aren't retaining the knowledge. That's one of the biggest flaws of these standardized test-based curriculums; students don't understand what these standards, such as Common Core, were trying to teach them. As someone who both excelled and struggled with Common Core standards, I can say that it was truly one of the worst experiences. The Common Core-Based curriculum burned me out and gave me terrible anxiety.

Another problem centers on the unfairness of these tests and how it destroys student potential. These tests cause students to have a mentality of "if I don't pass, I'll be held back" or "if I don't get this score, I'll be put in remedial reading or remedial math." That's incredibly unfair, as it doesn't truly show the potential of these students. In middle school and high school, these tests put me in classes I didn't need to be in because of how the standards "scored" me. My teachers would then push for me to be in the proper classes for my intellect rather than my scores, and my classes would change. In the article, "The Perils of Standardized Testing: 6 Ways It Harms Learning" by Saga Briggs, she quotes a statistic from the National Research Council, stating, "The National Research Council found that low-performing elementary and secondary school students who are held back do less well academically, are much worse off socially, and

are far likelier to drop out than equally weak students who are promoted,” (qtd. in Briggs, 2013). Briggs makes a valid point, as these tests absolutely cause a lot of social and academic problems. So many students are looked at as failures by the standards set in their respective states because they missed the passing mark by a few measly points. Briggs also states, “...it does not take into account individual variances in learning style or background, and teaches students to follow guidelines more than it teaches them to think outside the box,” (Briggs, 2013). Briggs is correct to assert that these tests are not based on student intellect or potential but rather on standards that place awful expectations on them. Closing the gap between outside standards and student intellect is key in solving educational testing problems in American schools.

The last problem I’d like to cover is how these tests aren’t dependable. Any number of things could go wrong with a standardized test that will go amiss. It could be a scoring system error, questions incorrectly being marked as incorrect or correct, or even how a person of authority can change some scores for money. Now, don’t get me wrong, U.S. testing scandals are a significant problem, but that’s not my point here. My point is that, like Murphy’s Law states, “Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong.” In the article, “High-Stakes Testing Is Flawed” by Dan French, he states, “The high error rate that has been experienced in virtually every major testing program and state in the nation in which high stakes tests are used calls to question the validity of such tests,” (French, 2008). French made a valid point here that these tests can sometimes be full of errors. French even went as far as to state some examples of this, such as, “In Minnesota in 2000, the testing company, NCS Pearson, made a scoring error on the tests of 47,000 students; of these, almost 8,000 eighth through twelfth grade students incorrectly received failing grades, with 54 high school seniors being denied diplomas until the scoring error was discovered,” (French, 2008). Though this article was written in 2008, seeing this example

was from 2000 and how high those numbers looked was astonishing. I understand that 8,000 is not a “huge” number, but it is when we look at something such as scoring errors. Standardized testing isn’t as dependable as the educational system once thought it would be; it’s far worse.

The problems generated by standardized testing in American education are easier to identify than the solutions. There are so many moving parts to the problem of over-depending on standardized test scores – students are wrongly evaluated, teachers teach to the tests, students and teachers are unfairly stressed, schools lose funding, and so much more. So, where to begin? By putting student intellect and curiosity first. By allowing teachers the freedom to teach the curriculum they believe in. By changing state laws and guidelines for how schools are ranked and how students advance to the next grade. By increasing parental involvement and opportunities to give feedback. The following paragraphs will explain solutions that I feel could make fundamental changes and start fixing the problems.

Going back to the problem surrounding standard-based curriculum, I believe I have come up with a decent solution: the removal of standard-based curriculum. In the book “The Test: Why Our Schools Are Obsessed with Standardized Testing - But You Don’t Have to Be,” by Anya Kamenetz, she states, “Instead of customizing learning to each student, standardization dictates one best way. In the end it seems pretty much everyone gets left out,” (Kamenetz, 8). The author makes a valid point on why a more customizable/interchangeable learning approach would be a great solution when replacing standard-based curriculum. This way, the same concepts aren’t taught year after year. Standard-based curriculum and testing can “change,” but not by much. Rather than using a standard-based curriculum and standardized testing, change the standards and remove what seems the least retainable from the scores and statistics. Standards do change; they’ll never be removed—for example, Common Core. When Common Core was

removed the year after I graduated high school, I was both ecstatic and severely underwhelmed. The state took way too long trying to do away with these awful standards, so instead of removing them entirely, the state replaced them with something different and new. Common Core was one of the reasons I suffered most with my testing anxiety. It created problems for parents as well. A lot of parents didn't understand what their children were being taught, which said a lot about how much of a failure that system of standards was. While the state did the bare minimum, in my opinion, with eradicating Common Core from the curriculum, that's not my point. My point is that a completely different approach is needed. Don't get me wrong, completely removing or simply replacing these standards isn't an instant solution. Making tests based on a standard-based curriculum has become a little pointless. While standardized testing might not ever be eliminated, we can remove the standard-based element of them.

Another solution that could be garnered when eliminating standardized testing is ridding it from elementary curriculums. Now, don't get me wrong, I understand that these are used for practice, but this is destroying the confidence in these young children. Instead of these tried-and-true tests, replace them with something better, something engaging. To put it another way, instead of giving these kids a physical test, have teachers provide an interactive alternative that doesn't feel like a test. Kahoot is a great way to test these younger kids without making them feel like they're taking a test. This is not to say get rid of them now, but rather ween them out little by little. In the article, "The Paradox of Standardized Testing," by Joshua P. Starr, he states, "I would love to tell my kids to reject those test results altogether...and I'd also like to tell every superintendent and principal that they shouldn't be consumed with their test results every spring because there are more important things to worry about," (Starr, 2017). Starr makes a valid point here; instead of worrying about tests and causing fear and anxiety towards them, change the

system. Get rid of the fear of failing and being held back by changing the approach. No child between the ages of 5 and 11 should have to worry about being held back, simply because a test dictated that.

One last solution that could be garnered to “eliminate” standardized testing is parental involvement. The involvement of parents has wavered over the past couple of decades, and it’s shown. This is not to say that not every parent isn’t involved, but many are a lot less involved than others. Curriculums grow and change, and not all parents are going to understand what their children are learning. In the article, “Parents’ Perceptions of Standardized Testing: Its Relationship and Effect on Student Achievement,” by Monica Z. Osburn, Charles Stegman, Laura D. Suitt, and Gary Ritter, the authors list off studies on parental involvement and involve methods of increasing their involvement. The journal even included some constructs for parents, which had different opinions to choose from, stating, “...I am interested in the results of my child's tests...I think the teachers genuinely want my child to do well on the test...The standardized testing program is stressful for my child...” (Osburn, et al. 81). This is a great system to increase parental involvement and get a dialogue going on how they feel about these tests. If this were to be integrated into schools, it could push the possible “elimination” of standardized tests.

Standardized testing has ruined education for many students around the country; it’s all that’s taught and known nowadays. With curriculums changing around us all the time, standardized tests have become somewhat pointless. In a time like today, something needs to be done to get rid of them, like offering a non-standard-based curriculum or offering a more interchangeable approach. Eliminating standardized testing would provide not only a better

educational experience for students, but also parents. If we stay involved and provide ways to change the system, we could rid education of standardized testing for good.

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